

*Gospel Worthiness Stated :*

IN A

# SERMON

Preached in

EXON,

AT THE

YOUNG MEN'S  
LECTURE.

By SAMUEL CARKEET.

*Exeter*

THE SECOND EDITION.

BELFAST :

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MATTHEW X. II.

*Inquire who in it is worthy.*



A D I been call'd to preach to this Auditory at any other Season, I should have thought an Apology a very impertinent *Preface* to my *Sermon*. But tho', during the past Course of my Ministry, I have happily liv'd in unenvied, unmolested Obscurity, notwithstanding such a measure of Respect as I freely own superior to my Merit; yet I have, for some late Months, been so us'd to Misrepresentation and downright Calumny, that you must pardon me, if I am not without Jealousy, lest some should imagine I had made choice of this *Text* with a Design to embellish the Character of Persons, whose Notions they may think agreeable to my own; and throw an *Odium* upon others as *unworthy*, tho' nothing be farther from my Intention. To prevent such a Treatment, as far as possible, I declare with all Seriousness and Solemnity, I can lay my hand upon a peaceful Breast, and say, I have been no way concern'd in raising those fierce Contentions among us, which have of late given Diver-

tion to all who envy us our common Liberty, and created Pain to the very Heart of every Catholic-spirited Christian. Whatever Character Misapprehension or Art may have given me, I am as far from being an *Arian*, as I can be, without being a direct *Tritheist* or *Sabellian*: And if I thought any Notions spreading in the World were more dangerous than the last mention'd, I would not, for any thing, have done so much to give them a *Passport*, as some warm *Gentlemen* have done, who seem so much to suspect their Cause, or their Management, as to call in the Assistance of Authority to suppress them; which I take to be an effectual Slur upon any good cause, and a greater Complement upon a bad one, than I should be willing, in mere Prudence to allow it.

WHAT I design from this *Text* is, to help Christians on both sides, amidst our eager Disputes, to know from plain Scripture Characters, whether they are *Worthy*, since they cannot hope to be *infallible* in their Searches after Truth. The Inquiry is of such Importance, that one would think all Lovers of Truth, and the Peace of their own Minds, should be glad of help from any one, who would bring tolerable Security that He will not mislead them. For the Sincerity of my Intentions to inform you right, I can answer; but the best Security I can give, that I will not mislead you, thro' involuntary Mistake, is, that I will purposely avoid all intricate Reasoning and artful Harangues, and

and form my Inquiry intirely from Scripture Revelation.

IN the *Chapter* from whence my *Text* is taken, we have an Account of a Commission our blessed Lord gave the Twelve, to go forth and proclaim, with the Attestation of Miracles, the near Approaches of the Kingdom of God ; which was about to be set up under the immediate Administration of the *Messiah*, who was the Lord from Heaven, 1 Cor. xv. 47. By their first Commission they were restrained, as to the Exercise of their Ministry, and sent to the *Jews*, exclusive of the *Gentiles*, and *Samaritans* : But after our Saviour's Resurrection their Commission was enlarg'd, and they were authoriz'd by him to go, and *teach all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, Matt. xxviii. 18, 19. M A I . I

THE Words of my *Text* may very well be suppos'd a standing Directory to them, in the Execution of both these Commissions. To facilitate their Ministry, and give the greater Dispatch to their Progress from one Place to another, in publishing the Gospel, they have Orders, at their first entrance into any Place, to inquire whether there appear'd to be in it a competent Number of Persons worthy of their Labours, by being prepar'd to receive the Gospel, if it came attested with sufficient Evidence ; and accordingly to deport themselves, by a longer or shorter stay among them.

W H A T

WHAT I propose, by GOD's Assistance, to consider from the *Text* is,

I. WHO were the *Persons* whom the Apostles were to esteem, and treat as *Worthy*, in the first Promulgation of the Gospel.

II. BY what *Means*, and for what *Ends* they were directed thus to inquire into *Persons Worthiness*.

III. HOW far we may act by the same *Rules* in judging our *Worthiness*, in our present Inquiries into reveal'd Truths.

IV. VINDICATE the Account I shall give of the Notion of *Gospel Worthiness*.

V. MAKE some *Inferences*, which I think fairly deducible from what I have advanc'd.

I. I AM to consider who were the *Persons* the Apostles were to esteem, and treat as *worthy*, in the first Promulgation of the Gospel.

AND here I think it proper to drop this previous Remark: That Words of a very high Sound lose much of their legal Significancy, when they come to be explain'd in a Gospel Sense. By *Worthiness* therefore, we are not to understand any *meritorious Qualifications*, which gave Men a proper Claim to the Privileges of the *Messiah's Kingdom*; for then the Gospel which appeared unto all Men, bringing Salvation, would never have been call'd, *The Grace of God*.

*Tit.*

*Tit. 2. 11.* But by it we are evidently to understand, in the general, only a teachable Disposition, and a Preparedness of Mind to receive Instruction, without being blinded by fond Prejudices, or biased by worldly Motives, in Inquiries into the Truth and Goodness of that new Revelation of the Will of God, which was to be given to the World by Jesus Christ. Particularly,

I. THE Apostles were to esteem and treat those as *worthy*, who were disposed to receive, or reject their Revelation, according to the *Credentials* they brought of their coming from God. Neither Christ nor his Apostles claim'd such an implicit Faith in their Dictates, that the People should receive their Message without a Divine Testimony ; but continually appeal'd to Miracles, and the standing Revelation, as sufficient Motives to gain rational Assent ; and were willing their Report should stand or fall by the Evidence which attended it, *John 10. 37, 38. If I do not the Works of my Father, believe me not : but if I do, tho' ye believe not me, believe the Works.* The Christian Religion, at its first Publication, was to try its Fate among Persons of various and quite contrary Dispositions, which denominated them *worthy* or *unworthy*. Some, and indeed the Generality among the *Jews*, were so overrun with Prejudices ; so enslav'd to the Arbitrary Decrees of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, who had put their Fore-Father's, and their own *Authoritative Glosses* into the Room of the Sacred Text ;  
that

that they were Proof against the Conviction of Miracles, and deaf to the plainest Scriptures, which would easily have forc'd their Assent to Christianity, had they suffer'd the Scriptures to be their own Interpreters, and not blindly resign'd their Understandings to those unaccountably odd Interpretations, which were commonly receiv'd among them as genuine and authentic. To attempt the Conviction of Persons of this perverse Complexion, was, in effect, to spend Ammunition upon Rocks; since they would stop their Ears against a Demonstration, rather than it should penetrate their Understandings, and convince them of what they had no Mind to believe, *Acts 7. 51.* The Apostles met with some of this base Disposition among the *Gentiles* too, who drown'd the Voice of Reason with that popular Cry, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians, Acts 19. 34.* However, there were some honest Souls dispers'd among the unthinking Crowd, and the furious Zealots, who durst not reject the *Messiah*, or his Doctrine, without a fair Hearing, since both brought such just Pretensions of coming from *God*. Here and there stood an honest *Nathanael*, an *Israelite* indeed, who was, at least, willing to *come and see*, whether *any good thing* could come out of *Nazareth*. Some of all Sorts not only made *Pilate's* Inquiry, *What is Truth?* but had Patience enough to stay for an Answer, and Sincerity enough to be concluded by the Evidence. It is upon Record, to the everlasting Honour of the *Bereans*, and the perpetual Infamy

my of those at *Thessalonica*, and all Persons of the same Temper, *Acts* 17. 11, 12. *These were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of Mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these Things were so: therefore many of them believed.* Some were prepared for the Reception of the Gospel by those Measures of Knowledge, Faith, and Goodness they had receiv'd under a former Dispensation; others only by an inquisitive *Genius*, a teachable Disposition, and natural Sincerity, disposing them to embrace or reject it according to Evidence: But both of them were *worthy* according to the true Import of this Head, or else our Saviour had never said to the chief Priests and Elders, who were inflexible thro' Prejudice, *Mat.* 21. 31. *The Publicans and Harlots go into the Kingdom of GOD before you.*

THAT this is a true Notion of the *Worthiness* hinted at in my *Text*, we may learn from the Account given of those of a contrary Temper, *Verse* 13, 14. Who are reckon'd *unworthy*, as indispos'd to receive the Apostles, or so much as give their Message a fair Hearing, before they rejected it. Against such they were to *shake off the Dust of their Feet*, because they wou'd not receive, nor hear them, *Mark* 6. 11. This Account may be further confirm'd from *Acts* 13. 46. Where they who put away the *Word of the Lord* from them, are said to judge themselves *unworthy of eternal Life.*

2. THEY only were accounted *worthy* by our Saviour, who, after Conviction, were above being bias'd by any *Temporal Motives* to desert his Cause. When the Christian Religion made its first Appearance in the World, it had the Misfortune to be not only *every where spoken against*, *Acts 28. 21.* but almost every where persecuted too. Christ easily foresaw, such an unpopular Religion would gain few persevering Profelytes among those, whose Regards to him were establish'd upon no better Principles, than such as would truckle to Considerations drawn from Interest, Reputation, or the Will of imperious Mortals; who, from the Time they met with any Prospects of Difficulty, or were put under any Discouragements, would *go back, and walk no more with him.* Our Lord did not so much regard the Number, as the Quality of his Disciples; and was therefore very open in letting Men know before-hand what they must expect, if they would be Votaries of his Religion; well knowing, that such as enter'd themselves Christians ignorantly, or upon surprize, would afterwards only disgrace his Cause by a cowardly Retreat. This very Account he gives of the Measure of *Worthiness* expected in his Disciples, *Mat. 10. 37, 38. He that loveth Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me: And he that loveth Son or Daughter more than me, is not worthy of me: And he that taketh not his Cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.* Whoever was capable of being affrighted out of his

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his Religion by worldly Terrors, wheedled by Insinuations of Gain or Applause, or banter'd by the Scoffs of an Infidel Age, Christ very well knew was an Apostate in Heart, while a forward Christian in Profession. The Meaning of that foremention'd Text, and many others of a like Nature, is, that whoever would be influenc'd by the Solicitations of Friends, the Threats of Enemies, a Regard to humane Authority, or any temporal Considerations; to desert his Interest, and was not prepar'd, in habitual and prevailing Resolution, to digest all the Infamy, suffer all the Loss, and other temporal Inconveniences, which his Adherence to Christ might expose him to, was not worthy the Denomination of his Disciple.

II. I AM to shew by what *Means*, and for what *Ends* the Apostles are directed to inquire into Persons *Worthiness*.

THO' they had the Gift of discerning Spirits, yet it could not be our Lord's Intention to authorize them, in ordinary Cases, to pump for the Secrets of Men's Hearts, that they might with the better Grace condemn and abandon them as obstinate in their Infidelity. They were only to make the best Remark they could by humane Observation, who appear'd best dispos'd to embrace and adhere to the Truth, that they might not work upon unapt Materials, and labour in vain.

MUCH less will my *Text* warrant the Apostles Successors, who are far inferior to them, in setting up Courts of *Inquisition*, as in *Italy* and *Spain*; or making use of any less Terrors, to screw from Men a *Declaration* of the Sentiments of their Minds, that they may have Matter of Reproach and Accusation against them out of their own Mouths; or else, as effectually undermine their *Reputation*, by propagating a groundless Suspicion, that their stiff Silence proceeded from their being conscious of the Badness of their Principles; when, perhaps, their Obstinacy was Rational and Religious too, in as much as they durst do, or suffer any thing rather than discountenance those free spiritual Inquiries, which have, in most Ages since the Reformation, recover'd one Truth or other from under the Rubbish of inveterate and fashionable *Prejudices*; or contribute to the Growth of *Ecclesiastical Tyranny*, which has been the Cause of all settled Error; and whose Pretensions have, of late, been so well examin'd, that, I trust, it will, in due time, be generally disclaim'd, as an illegitimate Imposture, which has long usurp'd upon the Royalty of *Jesus*, and the Immunities of his free-born Subjects.

THE Apostles, and their Successors, were not to inquire into Persons *Worthiness*, in order to proceed judicially against any who rejected them and their Doctrine, to deliver them over, when and where

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where they could, to the *secular Arm*, as *Infidels*, or *Heretics convicted*; nor to call for *Fire from Heaven* to consume them; which Christ rebukes in his own Disciples, saying, *Ye know not what manner of Spirit ye are of*, Luke 9. 55.

It was, without doubt, as far from Christ's Intention, that the Successors of his Apostles should propagate his Religion, or any Part of it, by procuring the Civil Magistrate to annex Places of Honour and Profit to one Set of Opinions; but Fines and Imprisonment; or, at least, negative Discouragements to Sentiments happily, or unhappily, different from the Establishment. Truth and Error are the same in all Places, nor can any legal Constitution vary their Nature, or vacate a Christian's Obligations to embrace the one, and reject the other, as far as he can discern it. To suggest the contrary, is to plead for a *State Religion* indeed, and tell the People they need not search their *Bible*, but a *Statute Book*, in the choice of Opinions. Christ well knew that temporal Motives on either Side are far enough from being the proper Grounds of a rational, or religious Persuasion; and therefore disclaims them in his Religion, as tending to advance Hypocrisy, not Truth, *John 18. 36. My Kingdom is not of this World*. Christ was so sure of the Reasonableness, and Goodness of his Institution, that he distrusted not in the least, that *unarmed Truth* would be able to contend with *armed Error*, and force its Passage thro' the World. can't

can't therefore chuse but suspect that such Opinions and Usages in the Church, as can't be supported by Scripture and Argument, but are forc'd to flee to Authority for Protection, are mere Innovations, which may sooner be found in *Ecclesiastical Canons* than in the *Bible*.

AND that the Apostles were to enquire into Persons *Worthiness*, not to impose their Creed, tho' infallibly true, or persecute such as rejected it, we may learn from my *Context*, v. 13, 14. where all the Resentment they were to shew against those who rejected them, and their Ministry, was to leave them or their Infidelity, and to *shake off the Dust of their Feet as a Testimony against them*.

III. I AM to shew how far we may act by the same *Rules* in judging concerning our *Worthiness*, in our Inquiries into revealed Truths.

I GRANT, there is this very material Difference between the Apostles Case and ours: Their Doctrine came by Inspiration of God, and they were inabled to confirm it by Miracles; so that they might well judge of the *Worthiness* of their Hearers by their Reception of the Revelation itself, and particularly of the grand fundamental Article of it, *That Christ was the Son of God, and the Saviour of the World*. This they might learn from Christ himself, *John viii. 24. For if ye believe*

not that I am He, ye shall die in your Sins. I think the same Rule, without any Limitation, may be applied to any in our Age, who shall reject Christ and his Revelation, after sufficient Means of Conviction: Because such a Measure of Sincerity, as would have pass'd for Worthiness in our Saviour's Time, would, I am persuaded, determine any rational and honest Man in favour of his Religion at present, upon due Examination. But then, as for those Points which are held in dispute among wise, and sober-minded *Protestants*, who, in general, hold all that Faith which constituted the first Christians, or was in the *Creeds* for near four Hundred Years, I can't imagine a good God will judge us so much according to the Notions we form concerning them, as the Sincerity we have used in our Inquiries about them. A most worthy Bishop, who may, I think, pass for the best Manager in Controversy, has prov'd, that a Man must needs be justified in the best Choice he can make for himself; and has, I doubt not, captivated most who have a Capacity, Leisure, and Inclination to pursue close Reasoning. It seems Demonstration to me, that a Man must needs be justified in the best Choice he can make; for else, he must be justified in a worse, or can be justified in none at all. And whether a Man has made the best he could, must I think, unless we had some inspired Persons amongst us to judge who is a Heretic, that is, *condemned of himself*, Tit. iii. 11. be refer'd to the final Decision of Jesus Christ,

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who searcheth the Hearts, Rev. 2. 23. 'Tis not the Province of any fallible, uninspir'd Successors of the Apostles, to reveal new Doctrines, or prescribe new Laws to the Consciences of Men; but only to require them to receive the old ones, as obliging their Consciences, by the mere Authority of Jesus, as far as they can be help'd to discern them in their Bibles. And, in this respect, the Measure of *Worthiness* is the same; I mean Sincerity; and a close immediate Regard to Christ's Revelation, in order to form our Faith and Manners by it, is the Point on which our Worthiness turns. A Person holding the Foundation, who is humble, sincere, diligent, unbiass'd, and does his best to inquire into Truth from Scripture, who prays earnestly for the Assistance of the Holy Ghost, and holds no Truth in Unrighteousness, can hold no Error criminally, much less which is damning; because Sincerity, and not Infallibility, is made the Condition of the new Covenant, Phil. 2. 10. This seems to be the Import of 1 Cor. 3. 11--15. *For other Foundation can no Man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus [the] Christ. Now if any Man build upon his Foundation, Gold, Silver, precious Stones, Wood, Hay, Stubble; every Man's Work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it; because it shall be revealed by Fire, and the Fire shall try every Man's Work, of what sort it is. If any Man's Work abide, which He hath built thereupon, He shall receive a Reward. If any Man's Work shall be burnt, He shall suffer Loss, but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by Fire; or,*

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thro' *Five*. I will not pretend to say, a Man may be *worthy* in the Choice of a false Religion, and *unworthy* in the Choice of a true, according as he was directed by Education, Interest or Humour; or else by Conscience and fair Enquiry; because I am persuaded Sincerity would, in the use of proper Helps, always guide a Man to the Choice of the true Religion. But as to particular Opinions, and Differences among *Protestants*, who make the best Inquiries they can, I will venture to say, *without Submission*, a Man is not to be denominated *worthy*, so much by his being in the one right Way, which he may happily be led to by Education, or worldly Motives, as by his having form'd the best Choice he could according to Scripture, and adhering to it with inflexible Integrity, more from regard to Christ, and an invisible World, than any lower Considerations, which can never render any Profession or Practice Religious. I am assur'd a good God has not connected my Salvation with a dextrous way of thinking, unless he has given me such a Faculty, but with my Sincerity in the best use of the Faculties and Means I have: And therefore I would rather be found, under any Mistake imaginable, which has obtain'd among fair *Protestant* Inquiries, than guilty of their irrational Obstinacy and unchristian Fury, who blindly condemn what, for ought they know, may be Truth, since they never examin'd it.

UPON these Principles, which, I think, have Rational and Scriptural Evidence enough, it follows, that Ministers are not to condemn their People, or one another, nor People their Ministers, or each other, as *unworthy*, because they thwart them in their Speculations, unless their Notions are so evidently repugnant to our common Revelation, that 'tis impossible a Lover of Truth and Goodness should fall into them. This, were it not a Contradiction in Terms, fallible Men should be absolutely certain of, before they venture to sit in Judgment upon each others Title to Christianity, and Hopes of Salvation; since we are all the Servants of another Master, and cannot be in the least affected as to our eternal State by the Sentence of any Man, or Body of Men whatever. Till these Principles are solidly confuted by scriptural Evidence, a Christian may pass for *worthy*, whether he be led by fair Inquiry into Scripture to be a *Calvinist*, *Baxterian*, or *Arminian*; to be *Episcopal*, *Presbyterian*, *Independent*, or *Antipædobaptist*. Whoever he be who is studious above all things to know, and do the whole Mind and Will of Christ; does not knowingly take his Model of Religion from mere humane uninspir'd Compositions, but from his Bible, after the honest use of the best Helps he can get to understand it; who does not so much enquire to what Side of a Controversy secular Discouragements or Preferments, popular

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*Odium* or Applause are annexed, but what was the Mind of the Holy Ghost, and firmly adheres to that in Profession and Practice, may very well pass for a *worthy Person* : And whoever does, God will not, because Conscience cannot, I don't say, does not, condemn him. If such a one discovers the Spirit and Life of a Christian, we should charitably conclude he has as much of the Christian Faith as is necessary to his Salvation, even tho' we think we find something more, or contrary to his declared Sentiments in Scripture. Dr. *Hamond* \* informs us from *Photius* and *Evagrius*, that *Synesius* was advanc'd to the Dignity of a Bishop in the Christian Church, before he could assent to the commonly receiv'd Notions concerning the Resurrection of the Body.

UPON the whole, I think we may conclude every such Person *worthy*, who has Sincerity enough to have dispos'd him to embrace Christianity, had he liv'd in the Age of the Apostles ; and can now be said to disbelieve nothing reveal'd in the Scriptures, but thro' a mere Inability rightly to apprehend the Meaning of the Holy Ghost, after unprejudic'd Inquiry, and earnest Prayer. In short, a *worthy Person* is one whose religious Persuasions, Professions, and Practices depend not upon humane Determinations ; but he is

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\* *Discourse of Fundamentals*, Chap. 2. Sect. 9.

willing in all Things to be concluded by Divine Authority ; draws all his Motives from a future World, and not temporal Considerations ; is willing in all things to live godly in Christ Jesus, and peaceably with his fellow Christians ; and adheres to what he apprehends the Cause of God with a rational and Christian Obstinacy, against all Temptations of Flattery or Terror to the contrary ; like one who *first sat down and counted the Cost*, Luke xiv. 28.

IV. I AM to vindicate the Account I have given of the Notion of *Gospel Worthiness*. And particularly :

I. THIS Account must be true, because, without such a Disposition, the Christian Religion could never have obtain'd in the World. Had Mankind been subjected to the discretionary Authority of Civil Magistrates, or Church Guides in Matters of Religion, Christianity could never have been embrac'd without drawing the Guilt of downright Rebellion upon the Professors of it. The *Jewish Sanhedrim* met very often for the Determination of the main Controversy of that Age, *Whether Jesus were the promised Messiah or not*. But because they could not reconcile his Pretensions with their received Traditions, though they might easily have been reconcil'd with the Scriptures, they shew'd themselves at once fallible and wicked, by determin-

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ing against him. Some argued he could not be of God, *because he kept not the Sabbath-day, Job. ix. 16.* when the Truth was, he did not keep it according to their corrupt Glosses. After Christ's Death a vast Body of them pronounced him a Deceiver, *Matth. xxvii. 63.* And after his Resurrection, they command the Apostles *not to teach in the Name of Jesus, Acts iv. 18.* Nay, even the Heathens had so stiff an Establishment among them, that when the Apostles preached the Gospel at *Philippi*, they were accused to the Rulers for an Innovation. *Acts xvi. 20, 21. These Men do exceedingly trouble our City, and teach Customs which are not lawful for us to receive, nor observe, being Romans.* Now if the Council at *Jerusalem* had Authority to declare the Sense of Scripture, so as to bind the Consciences of the People, the Primitive Converts were condemnable for embracing Christianity, merely upon a Judgment of private Discretion, against the Decrees of their Church's Guides, and long receiv'd Traditions, which were thought by some of Force enough to overrule the most plain Sense of numerous Scriptures. Had not the Church's Authority, to oblige Persons to receive their Determinations without Examination, been a mere sham Presence, it would have been an unanswerable Prejudice against receiving Christianity; since the People were sure to be condemned which way soever they acted: By Christ's Sentence, if they believ'd

believ'd not in him ; and by theirs if they did. But we find our Saviour allows the meanest of the People to appeal from the Judgment of the *Sanhedrim* to the Scriptures, and to set up as Judges for themselves, if they would be at the Pains to enquire, though they should happen to contradict the Sentiments of their Superiors, who arrogantly enough claim'd a Right to interpret absolutely for them. *John v. 39. Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life ; and they are they which testify of me.* This Direction will bear out any Disciple of Christ, who is an impartial Inquirer after Truth, in preferring plain Texts of Scripture to the Decrees of all the uninspir'd Writers which have been, or are upon the Earth. And, indeed, they cannot approve themselves *worthy*, if they do not. If Persons might claim a Judgment of private Discretion in choosing a Religion for themselves before they could be Christians, they cannot be debar'd from the same Privilege, in forming a Judgment concerning the particular Matters reveal'd in that Religion.

2. ANOTHER Reason, why this must be a true Account of Christian *Worthiness*, is, That without it the Purity of Christian Faith and Worship can never be maintain'd in the World. We may take it for granted, the Blessed *Jesus*, the adored Author of our Religion, *in whom* (or which) *were hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge*, Col. ii. 3. has therein provided some effectual Method

to preserve, or purge his perfect Institution from Corruptions. There is, I believe, no other conceivable way of attaining this End, but either by authorizing one, or more, to bind their Determinations upon the Consciences of others as infallible as themselves ; or leaving all to free and impartial Inquiries after Truth from Scripture, without being accountable to any, beside God, in Matters which relate merely to his Favour, and to Salvation. The former Method has been tried too long, to the bringing Errors into the Church, the driving Christianity out of some Nations, and Protestantism out of others, by mere unaccountable Authority. The latter has been tried too little : But whatever Good there is in the World, or Church, is the Fruit of it ; particularly the *Reformation*. I am persuaded, were this worthy Spirit indulg'd in its full Latitude, it would soon bring the Reformation to a much greater Perfection ; nor would any Errors, which might occasionally arise, long stand the Test of Scriptural Inquiries : And they could not grow very formidable, unless they have the Countenance of some Authority. They, who contend for the former Method, had need produce their Commission, and a very plain one, and try how they can justify the Reformation, and Nonconformity, upon those slavish Principles. They, who plead for the latter, can shew their Charter for the Liberty they claim : *Rom xiv. 5. Let every Man be fully persuaded in his own Mind. The*  
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Church of *Rome* is aware, should she allow the Scriptures to be read in a way of private Judgment, the People would soon grow too wise to remain in her Communion; and therefore they are expressly taught to resolve their Faith into the Church's Decisions: But methinks *Protestants*, who are not aware of something among them which won't bear the Scripture Test, need be apprehensive of no Danger from allowing this Liberty in its full Extent. It seems plain to me, that wherever any Men, or Body of Men Ecclesiastical or Civil, maintain, or act as if they did maintain a Claim unaccountable to Reason and Scripture of interpreting the Bible in an authoritative Way, and imposing such Interpretations upon others as a Standard of Truth, or a Test of Orthodoxy, the Spirit of *Popery* so far remains among them, though it pass under the Name even of *Presbytery*, or *Independency*; and they have unwarily quitted the only sure Ground, on which they can defend the Reformation. If private Christians are not at Liberty, and oblig'd to consult their Bibles for themselves, and follow the Result of their own free Inquiries; why should *Protestants* delude them, with putting such a Book into their Hands, which will often bring them into the unhappy *Dilemma* of seeing themselves oblig'd by two inconsistent Rules, and being condemn'd which ever way they act? If after reading the Scriptures they profess, or act contrary to what, upon the best

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Judgment they can make, appears to be the Mind of Christ, they are sure to be condemned by him for Hypocrisy to Men, and Disloyalty to himself. And if they are under real Obligations to comply with Humane Authority, they might justly be condemn'd for not being *Papists* at *Rome*, and *Protestants* at *Geneva* ; for not using a Liturgy and Ceremonies in *England*, and for using them in *Scotland* : And Christ must be oblig'd to ratify the Sentence of his Vicegerents, whatever Conscience laid in the Case. No Church, which pretends not to be infallible, need be offended at the Supposition, that in some Cases she may actually err. And 'tis plain, whatever Mistakes or Abuses obtain among Mankind in Doctrine, Worship, or Discipline, must if at all, be rectified by such Methods as I have shewn agreeable to the Gospel Institution. Whatever meer Humane Schemes might suffer, by giving a full Scope to this *Gospel Worthiness*, I am perswaded it would contribute very much to the Revival, and spreading of pure, primitive, unadulterated, apostolical Christianity. The Christian Religion never gain'd so much Ground, as when it was so far from being enforced by Humane Laws, that it was discountenanced by them every where, and was to force a Passage to the Consciences of Men by its own intrinsic Evidence, Beauty, and Goodness ; which was its Condition for several Centuries. Nor can I ever hope it will prevail much, till this Principle

ple of Liberty be better understood, and more closely pursued. If all Persons are oblig'd to propagate what they esteem Truth, and oppose what they call Error, with Force, or any other Method than Argument, and explaining dark Scriptures by plain ones ; it follows, that he who is in an Error, which he must needs account Truth till better convinc'd, is oblig'd, by this Rule, to promote that Error at any Rate, and persecute real Truth : And 'tis easy to imagine (as the Case now stands) that Truth would suffer most, upon these Principles, even in *Christendom*.

3. ANOTHER Consideration, which justifies this Scriptural Account of *Worthiness*, is, that without such a Spirit a Person cannot be a true Believer. I know 'tis become a useful Stratagem in Ecclesiastical Policy, to compliment those as *worthy*, whose Religion turns upon an implicit Faith, and gives their Imposers no Disturbance. But 'tis certain, whoever owe their Persuasions about Religion more to Education and implicit Faith, than to any Acquaintance with their Bibles, and are of a Spirit abject enough to be determin'd by the Vote of the Age or Country they live in ; though they are sure to be number'd among the Orthodox, whether they live in *Turkey*, or *England*, at *Rome*, or *Geneva* ; yet they cannot well number themselves among the Faithful ; because their Religion is not owing to their  
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Faith in God, but their blind Submission to Men, and is finally resolv'd not into Divine but Humane Authority. I dare not warrant such a Profession acceptable in any, at any time, or any where, after a fair Proposal of better Means of Conviction; because they believe more upon Humane Authority, than upon Scriptural Evidence, which latter is the very Ground of Divine Faith. And if they are inflexible in what they dare not bring to the Test of God's Word, tho' they happen to be in the right, they owe it to their Incogitancy, and the irrational Obstinacy of their Temper. I am not in the least doubtful, but a Person is justifiable as long as sincere, in adhering to Principles instil'd into him in his Education, which came recommended with some Reasons; I mean, before he had any Reason to be apprehensive that the contrary Persuasion was, or might be attended with more: But if after that he declines Enquiry for fear of Conviction, or hardens himself to resist Evidence, as it gains upon him, he needs a better Advocate than I am, to vindicate his Sincerity. Nor indeed can Imposition, or Persecution alter Mens Opinions, or Faith; and consequently it cannot alter their Profession, without their proving insincere: *James i. 20. The Wrath of Man worketh not the Righteousness of God.*

V. I AM to make some *Inferences*, which I think fairly deducible from what I have advanc'd. Particularly :

I. THIS Doctrine not only licences, but obliges Christians, in all controverted Points, to form the best Judgment they can from their Bibles, in a way of private Judgment. We not only may, but should, as we have Capacities, and Opportunities, examine into the Grounds of our Assent to what we receiv'd first, as we did our Language, from others ; and bring every Persuasion, which we owe to Memory, and not Judgment and Faith, to the Test of Scripture ; and not suffer this Gospel Privilege to be wrested from us by any, who are vain enough to think themselves fit to prescribe to our Consciences. Indeed we are not to commence mere *Sceptics* in Religion, or hesitate in Matters which we find legible to our own Eyes in sacred Writ ; which we ought not to be wrangled out of by any Sophistry whatever, but silence the Contradictions of pert Reason against the Truth of a Proposition plainly reveal'd, tho we are not wise enough to tell how these Things can be, 2 *Tim.* i. 13. *Hold fast the Form of sound Words, which thou hast heard of me.* But then, if we would not be impos'd upon, and have our Faith over-rul'd by Prescription, we must not hold fast any mere humane Forms with the same

Stiffness

Stiffness as those which are Apostolical, lest we retain a Mixture of Error with the Truth. If Antient or Modern *Confessions*, the Determinations of *Councils* and *Assemblies* may be as safely depended upon as the Scriptures, why are they not, in GOD's Name, bound up with our *Bibles*, that we may know when our Rule of Faith is compleat ? The Difference between the Scriptures, and humane Explications is this : Our Bibles only reveal to us that such Articles of Faith are true ; but *Dictators* in Divinity arbitrarily determine for others in what precise Sense they are so, tho' God has never reveal'd it, and then hereticate all who will not subscribe with the same Assurance to their Explications, as to the Bible ; tho' they can ever so plainly, in some Cases, discern the Inconsistency. We should learn from this Doctrine to' understand our Christian Liberty better than to yield to such a manifest Invasion of Christ's sole Prerogative, to the undermining the Foundation, on which the Christian Religion, the Reformation, and Non-conformity stand, tho it were to save our Reputation, our Estates, or even our Lives, if any should be wicked enough to take them from us upon such weak Pretences. The only Principle upon which the Apostles could justify themselves in Preaching, and their Converts in receiving a Religion contrary to those established among *Jews* and *Gentiles* ; upon which *Protestants* can justify their Separation from the Church of *Rome*,  
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and *Protestant Dissenters* their's from the Church of *England*, is, that which I have insisted on. Every even the least Departure from this Principle, is an apparent Advance towards *Popery*, and a manifest Retreat from the avow'd Principles of *Nonconformity*. I shall therefore inculcate that Advice, *Gal. 5. 1. Stand fast in the Liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.* What was intail'd upon us by so indear'd a Benefactor, should be accounted valuable for his Sake, and be the last thing we parted with. The most Illiterate have as much Liberty to judge for themselves, as the most profound Scholars; because whatever Capacities they have, they shall be judged according to them, and not by the Attainments of others. Christ has left his written Word open to the perusal of all his Disciples, and oblig'd them, in the use of Ministerial and other occasional Helps, to understand it as well as they can, and practise accordingly with inviolable Integrity. And, I am sure, no *Creed-Imposers* upon Earth will be able to bear us out at the Day of Judgment, in translating our Faith and Obedience from Christ to them, whom we think severe enough to crush us, if we do not. For my part, I should tremble to resign my Understanding and Conscience to the Guidance of fallible Men, because God hath bid me *search the Scriptures* for my self: And whoever would pretend to warrant me in implicit Faith or blind Obedience, I know I shall be condemn'd for Insincerity

Sincerity if I do not believe, and praise according to the Doctrines and Laws I my self apprehend to be reveal'd in Scripture. But, however, this Liberty must be us'd with much Modesty, a humble Jealousy of our own Understandings, and a suspended Judgment till we are Masters of the Evidence on both Sides ; with fervent Prayer for divine Assistance, and a charitable Temper to those who differ from us, who may be more worthy than our selves, while yet our own Temper and Conduct may be such, as may satisfy us that God will not condemn us, *Gal.* 5. 13. *Brethren, ye have been called to Liberty ; only use not Liberty as an Occasion to the Flesh.*

2. **THIS** Doctrine should prevent Christians from imposing their Sentiments upon each other. 'Tis possible a Man may be a Lover of GOD and Truth, that is *Worthy*, and yet under a Mistake : And therefore, 'tis a Temper very unfriendly to Mankind, as well as alien from the Genius of Christianity, to bear hard upon any for their close pursuit of Truth, and their immediate regard to Christ's Revelation of it. I am persuaded one of the most successful Stratagems the Devil has used to hinder the Progress, and corrupt the Simplicity of the Gospel, has been, by tempting Men to put Truth upon the Courtesy of Authority ; so that they were always in the right, who could by any Means of Flattery, or Terror, procure the greatest Numbers  
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( tho' they are usually bias'd or unthinking )  
 to authorize their Decisions in Controversy nay,  
 to call in the *Magistrate* to silence, or the *Mob* to  
 insult those, who had most to say for themselves.  
 How much soever this Spirit obtain'd in the  
 darker Ages, methinks Men of Sense and Tem-  
 per should now grow weary, and asham'd of such  
 Methods as disgrace a good Cause, and can be  
 needed only by a bad one, and dismiss them, be-  
 fore the Rabble grow wise enough to despise them,  
 and think meanly of Persons who pretend not to  
 be infallible, and yet will trample upon any who  
 will not own their being in the right. Indeed the  
 Claim of the *Roman Church* to Infallibility is  
 weak enough, as well as arrogant ; but the Claim  
 of *Protestants* to impose their Sentiments, is ma-  
 nifestly senseless, because inconsistent with their  
 professed Renunciation of all Pretences to Infalli-  
 bility. If Dr. *Calamy* understood the Principles  
 of the Protestant Dissenters, He tells us in his  
 Account of them, That " in their Assemblies,  
 " without pretending to any *Authority*, they give  
 " their Judgment in such Matters as come be-  
 " fore them, or are refer'd to them, &c. " 'Tis  
 Pity any in these Parts shou'd begin to take up,  
 or give the least Countenance to a Spirit of Im-  
 position, when many of our very worthy Brethren  
 in the Establishment grow weary of it, and ma-  
 ny of our own Denomination have made so brave  
 a Stand against it. For my Part, I can't but  
 think an *imposing Nonconformist* as great a Con-  
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tradition as a *Nonresisting Rebel*; and wonder with what Face they can claim an Indulgence to their own Sentiments, from the Powers of this World, who are for requiring a Subscription to unscriptural Words, of their Brethren, under Penalties. There is a *Canon* in force against urging our own Apprehensions upon others as *Tests* of Friendly or Christian Communion, *Rom. 14. 1. Him that is weak in the Faith receive ye, but not to doubtful Disputations.* Methinks every *Protestant* should tremble to join in imposing such Tests upon others, under the Terror of losing their Usefulness, Reputation, and Interest; which necessarily gains Hypocrites to their Party, and can bear hard only upon those worthy Persons, who prefer Conscience to all temporal Considerations. This hath been a usual Means of filling the Churches with Prevaricators, and Prisons with the Sincere. And tho', blessed be God, the Spirit of Bigotry be now disarm'd of the grand civil Terrors, yet 'tis plain, whoever is gain'd by the lesser Arts of Persecution, merely to prevent Disgrace or ill Usage, must, from that Instant, commence *Hypocrite*, tho' he may pass for a new *Convert*. I would, in the Spirit of Meekness, ask Persons who approve such Methods this Question: Whether if I should say to them plainly, "If I humour you, I must sin against Conscience; but, however, rather than ruin my self, I will comply: „ they would not have more reason to reject me for this, than

for disowning their Authority? If they allow it, they must own 'tis two great a Fetch of Ecclesiastical Policy, to lay me under such a Temptation, when, unless they convince my Judgment by proper Arguments, they can only gain me to their Party by first debauching my Conscience. Besides, I would ask any who insist upon a *Subscription*, or *Declaration* of abstruse Points, in humane Words, as a Term of a Man's Ministry, or christian Communion: Whether the Form of Words they impose, or expect, makes the Article of Faith plainer than the Scripture, or not? If the Scripture speaks full as plain, why, I wonder, should not a Declaration in these scriptural Words cure their Jealousy; since the Declarer professes as much as they do? If no Words in Scripture make the Matter so plain, how came they to be so confident where the Scripture is silent? or what new Revelation legitimates their making the Matter plainer than the Holy Ghost has done? Either the Holy Ghost spoke as plain as he could, or as plain as God thought proper for a Rule to the Churches. If he spake as plain as he could, they are no plausible Contenders for his *Divinity* (which, I believe, is generally acknowledged among Christians; who fancy they can speak plainer. If he spake only as plain as God thought proper, they certainly invade his Prerogative who pretend to make the Matter plainer, and urge it upon Men's Consciences. If any say, this pacific Method, I propose,

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would introduce *Arians* and *Socinians* into the Church. I answer, They may modestly make as bold with humane Words, as with those of the Holy Ghost; and he that can misunderstand his *Bible*, or prevaricate, may as easily misunderstand a *Creed*, or conceal his own Sense under other Men's Words; especially if he be dextrous in Interpretations. Yea, he may think in this Case, he has a greater Liberty to impose upon his Imposers. But whatever Persons this Method would introduce, the contrary would certainly introduce Hypocrites, which are worse than either. If any say *Papists* will subscribe the *Bible*, I deny they will subscribe it as its own Interpreter, or any other way than as their Church has interpreted it; which may, or may not be the Sense of Scripture: And I think whoever subscribes it, as interpreted by any Man, or Body of Men, does not properly subscribe the Scripture, but that Interpretation, which is by these Means, in effect, become his Bible. If any Object, That every Minister makes a *Test*, when he demands a Confession of Faith at Baptism: I answer, That they only who urge a large Scroll of disputable Points, are concern'd to answer it, or take the Hint to relinquish a Practice they cannot defend. For my part, I can look upon private Men's urging any unscriptural Test upon *Protestants*, as no better than obtruding another Gospel upon us, under a specious Pretence of explaining the Old, and only Authentic

thentic one. A Submission to such a Claim of any fallible Ministers upon Earth, appears to me a betraying the Fundamental Right of the Christian Church; and therefore I hope those worthy Persons who differ from me in this Sentiment, will bear with me, if I protest against any such Compliance, till better convinced of its Lawfulness.

3. THIS Doctrine should restrain Christians from passing rash and uncharitable Judgment concerning each other, on the Account of different Sentiments in Religion. No doubt there are Persons *worthy*, in a Gospel Sense, on both Sides, in our *Protestant* Controversies. That Man must have an unexercis'd Head, or an uncharitable Heart, who suggests the contrary; since they who have done more than dip into a Controversy, to learn the *Shibboleth* of a Party, and furnish themselves with Matter of Reproach against others, whose Heads and Hearts are as well turn'd as their own, though they find Argument enough on one side to determine their Judgment, find enough on the other to constrain their Charity. It becomes those especially to cultivate Charity to the utmost, who have lately varied their Sentiments; since their Spirits must have taken a base Turn indeed, when they imagine good Men may not fairly be concluded by those Arguments, which formerly appear'd conclusive to themselves. To prevent uncharitable Surmises  
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on all Hands, I would ask furious Bigots, Whether they dare hear, and consider all the contrary minded have to say from Scripture, before they pass Sentence on them, and pursue them with the modish Penalty of Defamation? Have you, by Examining the Scriptures impartially on both sides, found the seeming Evidence run so intirely on one, that nothing but wilful Obstinacy can resist it? Dare you pronounce that none of those, you so magisterially condemn, have examined the Sense of Scripture as closely and impartially, and pray'd as fervently for the Assistance of the Holy Ghost, as you have done? That none of them live as well, and shew as much Tendernefs concerning Truth and Duty, Error and Sin, as you do? I would hope it might contribute something to restrain or stop the Growth of this Epidemical Vice, barely to read the Apostle's Challenge to such as invade their common Master's Province, *Rom. xiv. 4. Who art thou that judgest another Man's Servant? To his own Master he standeth or falleth.* The Apostle supposes him weak and erroneous, and yet defies any Man to judge him, merely because another's Servant, accountable to Christ alone in those Matters. Upon the whole, I am persuaded, they who endeavour to establish their Notions upon the Ruins of other Men's Sincerity or Reputation, and their own Charity, can never, supposing them in the right, make amends for the Damage they do the Church by their  
 Outrage,

Outrage. This made the Learned Davenant say, that *erring Cyprian deserved better of the Church than orthodox Stephen*. I shall subjoin to this Head the pathetic Exhortation of the Apostle, *Eph. iv. 2, 3. I therefore, the Prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that you walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith ye are called, with all Lowliness and Meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in Love: endeavouring to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace*. And because Christianity is a *Practical Science*, and a *Doctrine according to Godliness*, and the most Orthodox Notionist is not near so acceptable to God, as one whose Temper and Manners are formed according to the Model of Christ's Religion, I shall relieve your Patience by putting up the Apostle's Prayer for the completing your *Worthiness*, *Col. i. 9, 10. even that ye may be filled with the Knowledge of his Will, in all Wisdom, and Spiritual Understanding, that ye might walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing; being fruitful in every good Work, and increasing in the Knowledge of G O D.*

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